

# In a world of confusion, student strives for individuality

By CARMEN LIVINGSTON  
Collegian Features Writer

Malcolm Thomas wears a hat to avoid fussing with his hair and dresses casually in dungarees and a T-shirt. Hip hairstyles and flashy clothes aren't his forte.

Studying scriptures from the ancient religion Kmt (pronounced Kamite) and conversing with people on any level of black consciousness is Malcolm Thomas's daily ritual — his way of life.

Thomas has spent much of his four years at the University organizing discussions for Black Caucus's re-education committee and planning sessions for the group's Afrikan School. He also abides by a vegetarian diet that links him closer to the original practices of African spirituality.

"You can never forsake spirituality for the material world, without some repercussions," Thomas (senior-elementary education) said. "There is no such thing as a separation between the spiritual and secular."

In an exuberant tone, Brenda Bell (senior-public relations), a close friend of Thomas for five years, explained that his ultimate goal is to educate African-American children about their heritage.

Bell commented on Thomas's personality and consistency in his beliefs.

"He has a very strong aura or inner-sense about himself," Bell said. "He gives you a lot of attention and lets you know he cares about you."

But some University students say Thomas is "lost in the sauce" and isn't going to find success in the real world, Bell said.

"I think he's a very misunderstood young man and people don't know how to accept his way of life," Bell said. "I wouldn't say

he is radical. He just lives what he believes."

Thomas realizes that he might sound far-fetched to someone with a different outlook.

"It's very important to note that I'm not striving to come off like some big mystic who is off in his own little realm," he said. "I just try to examine and internalize certain values that might help me gain power over myself and the world around me."

When people categorize Thomas as militant or radical, he feels they do not understand the urgency of the current global situation. Many reports, newspapers and magazines have portrayed black people in the midst of social, economic and familial crises.

"I am just someone trying to respond adequately to my circumstances," Thomas said. "People who classify me as militant or extreme do not understand how the world is creating very extreme conditions which require extreme solutions."

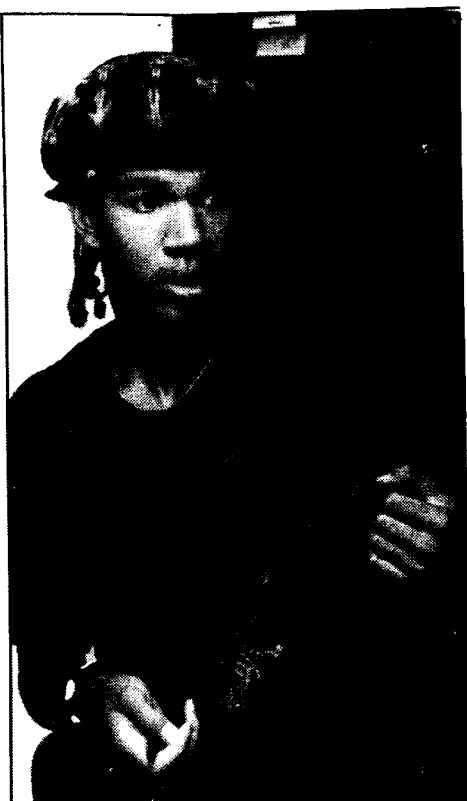
His manner becomes more earnest as he explains the concept of African spirituality.

"The best way to clarify my views on black spiritual practice and liberation would be to bring them under the umbrella of universal spiritual upliftment and liberation to avoid having them pigeon-holed."

Thomas wants to emphasize that African spirituality and liberation of black people are one tightly woven entity that should not be thought of as separate spheres.

"I'm striving to look at my history and my people with a discerning eye, sifting through all that which might be dysfunctional."

According to revisionist history, ancient

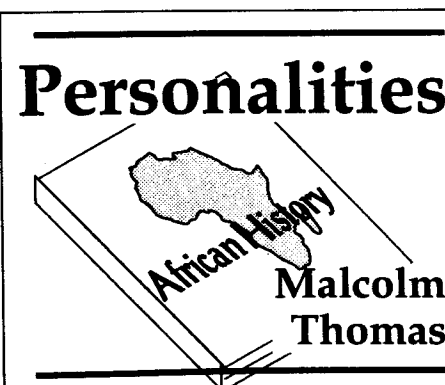


Collegian Photo/Chris Gaydos

African civilizations are revered as the earliest and highest developed societies; therefore African ethics are at the basis of all other religions, Thomas said.

He further characterizes African spiritualists as harmonious and concerned with a fundamental "greater good." A lack of individualism, classism, sexism and chauvinism characterize African spirituality's current mode, he added.

"The liberation of black people finds its



Collegian Graphic/Suzanne M. Atkinson

relevance and urgency in that black people are the most dispossessed and traumatized members of the known universe," he said.

"As we rise, all oppressed people will consequently and subsequently rise, signaling a gradual restoration of balance in the world."

During his childhood in an urban section of Pittsburgh, Thomas's parents urged him to discover more about his black heritage and display it proudly. In fact, he was named after Malcolm X.

"It wasn't as if anything was ever shoved down my throat by my parents," Thomas said. "They primarily just helped impart certain fundamental values such as dignity, knowledge and excellence."

But Thomas wasn't always in tune with his spiritual development. Throughout his adolescence, Thomas became disillusioned with social institutions such as school. Now he admits his habits and actions were in many ways self-serving and hedonistic.

"I honestly believed that the highest goal in life was pleasure," he said. At 17 years old, Thomas had a rejuve-

nating experience after reading *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, which rechannelled his misguided enthusiasm into finding ways to uplift his people.

"I remember going to the library everyday getting books, pamphlets, anything I could work with," he said.

Although Malcolm X and other heroic black leaders influenced Thomas, his father's persona — organized, meticulous and responsible — geared Thomas into a more positive light.

"These are all things which I've experienced deficiencies in, and I'm trying sincerely to overcome these flaws," Thomas said. "I remember growing up and thinking that if I could be just more like my dad, I would be able to progress much further in life."

"I remember wanting to be my father for many years, because my respect and everyone's respect for him was just that great," Thomas said. "I could make reference to Malcolm X or any of the many figures which have impacted upon me, but any such references might obscure my father's role as the towering figure throughout my life."

While Thomas praises his father's personal strengths, the two do not share a close relationship. His mother appears to be his confidante.

"She's free-spirited and less structured," Thomas said. "Some people might see my mother as more of an idealist as opposed to my father who is a realist."

Perhaps Thomas's biggest challenge is to graduate this year — school has been his Achilles' heel for the past four years.

"School is going better and I'm very optimistic," he said. "I'm currently at a crossroads where I have to either put up or shut up."

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